When Disaster Struck, the GOBC was Found

By Fl. Lt. Trevor Collins

READY for EMERGENCY

A HOWLING GALE backed by heavy seas failed to discourage members of the Ground Observer Corps rescue group on Salt Spring Island recently when they joined forces with the RCAF and other agencies in an attempt to rescue eight crewmen from a sunken tug.

The American tug Henry Foss bound from Port Angeles to Ladysmith on Vancouver Island was holed and sunk about 4 a.m. during the storm within sight of Ganges Harbor. Some residents say the storm was the worst they had ever seen in the area.

First indication the vessel had foundered was a radio message from the Gulf Islands ferry Cy Peck to the RCAF's Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Vancouver.

She was on a scheduled trip from Ganges when a man was spotted about 8 a.m. clinging to the bottom of an overturned lifeboat. A second man was nearby, floating in his lifejacket.

Despite heavy seas the men were picked up and rushed to hospital in Ganges.

It was learned six other men were unaccounted for and the rescue centre in Vancouver alerted the Ground Observer Corps at Ganges.

Captain V. C. Best, regional supervisor at Ganges, was in Vancouver at the time of the incident but his deputy, Colonel D. J. Crofton, immediately took over and alerted observation posts in the vicinity.

Marine vessels, available for search and rescue purposes, put to sea as soon as crews could be mustered.

Meanwhile, a Canso aircraft from 121 Communications and Rescue Flight at Sea Island, was overhead and crews scanned the water for possible survivors.

The Cy Peck was back at the scene and other vessels included the Sonny Boy, operated by Nelson Warren; the Forestry Supervisor, skippered by Henry Doerasen; the Sophia under the direction of Daral Georgeson; the Ivor Foss, sister ship to the sunken tug; an RCMP vessel with Constable Spencer Smith and the fishing boat Cape Blanco.

While the larger vessels were in radio contact with each other and the rescue centre in Vancouver, some of the smaller boats searched without direction.

The RCMP Canso spotted what appeared to be men in lifejackets and other debris from the air.

To locate possible survivors for the smaller boats the pilot dropped smoke floats to pinpoint the locations.

When Mr. Doerasen prepared to put to sea aboard the Forest Supervisor he was without a crew. Nels Voden of Ganges, who was standing on the dock, volunteered to help and went along as crew.

Two hours later both men aboard the 34-foot boat had picked up two seamen from the sunken ship. They were both dead.

Mrs. Adrian Wolfe-Milner, a Ground Observer Corps spotter on the northeast side of the harbor, one of those alerted earlier, spotted what she thought was a lifejacket and a small boat in the water.

A fallen tree during the gale had severed her telephone line but she managed to reach a neighbor and pass the information to Col. Crofton at Ganges who relayed it to the rescue centre in Vancouver.

All boats equipped with radio were advised and the search concentrated in the new area.

The vessel Cy Peck, which had disembarked her passengers on its second trip to port with two survivors, cancelled her scheduled run to continue the search.

James Campbell, from Saturna Island, who is a volunteer member of the GObC rescue group, happened to be in Ganges visiting Col. Crofton when the incident took place.

He was without a crew for his 34-foot boat. With nothing more he could do ashore to assist, Col. Crofton volunteered and continued the search at sea with Mr. Campbell after requesting all GObC spotters in the area to comb the beaches as far as possible.

By noon the remaining six bodies had been picked up.

One of the two men taken to hospital earlier also died.

Capt. Best was loud in his praise in the manner his organization carried on without his direction.

"Col. Crofton did a wonderful job and I cannot speak too highly of the efforts of the observers and volunteer rescuers," he declared.

A retired British army officer with service in India before the First World War, Capt. Best is in charge of seven observation posts in the Gulf Islands of Salt Spring, Saturna, Galiano and "in an emergency I can call on residents of North and South Pender," he added.

While the prime role of the GObC is to report the movements of aircraft to the RCAF Filter Centre in Vancouver, the secondary obligation is for assistance in search and rescue operations in British Columbia under the direction of the Rescue Co-ordination Centre.

The secondary role is well organized under the direction of 73-year-old Capt. Best.

Doctor Ivor Williams of Ganges is the official doctor of the GObC rescue group and "he is ready to go at any time," said Capt. Best.

He stressed the importance of having local people as members of the rescue organization.

"Seventy-five members of the Salt Spring Island Rod and Gun Club are all available in an emergency," he said, "and these men are all hunters and fishermen who know the country like the back of their hand."

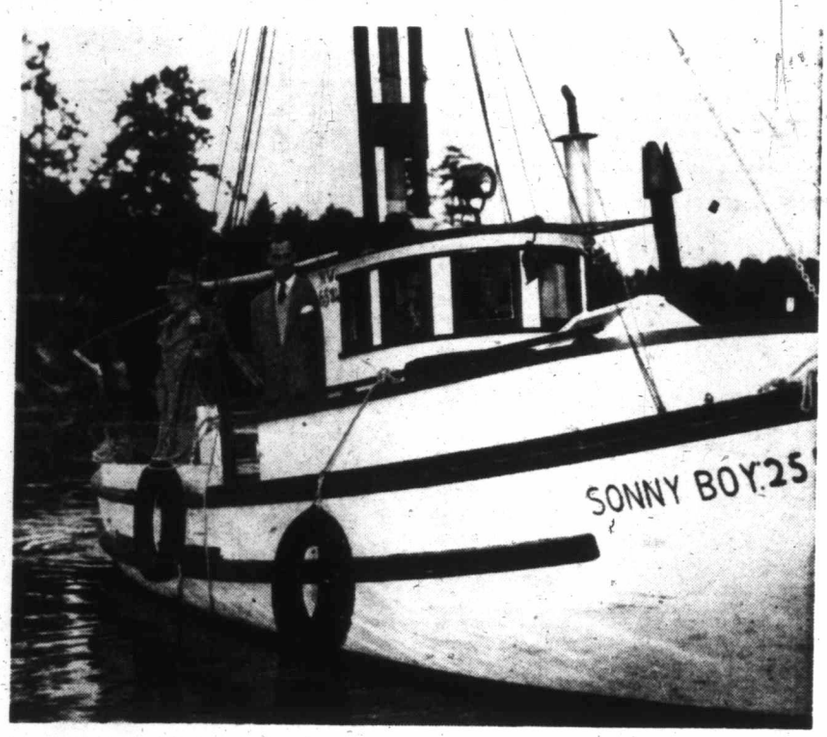
The club is under the presidency of Fred Morris.

Capt. Best was with the wartime Aircraft Detection Corps in 1942 and continued through until the newly-formed Ground Observer Corps was activated with the opening of the filter centre in Vancouver in 1952. He was made regional supervisor of the Ganges area.

He moved to Salt Spring Island 40 years ago and during the Second World War four sons served with the Royal Air Force and one with the merchant marine.

In 1945, Capt. Best was cited for "his high organizational ability and unlimited devotion of time and energy" by the RCAF for his work with the Aircraft Detection Corps. He was one of 16 presented with the award in Western Canada.

Again in 1945 he was singled out by the Air Force and received a second award for "meritorious service" in the Ground Observer Corps. This time he was one of 10 in British Columbia.



When the Ground Observer Corps was alerted following the sinking of the tugboat Henry Foss, Nelson Warren, skipper of Sonny Boy, immediately put to sea. Pictured aboard his craft here are Capt. Victor C. Best, regional supervisor of GOBC; Col. D. J. Crofton, his deputy. Skipper Warren is in the pilothouse.

THIS WEEK'S ANAGRAM

How is your vocabulary? There is no better or more fascinating way to improve it than by solving these anagrams each week. Add the letters in the first column to the letters in the second column, and rearrange the letters so as to form a new word. EXAMPLE: FEND plus SEE equals? Answer: DEFENSE. Can you solve the following anagrams?

(1)	RULE	PLUS	SEC	EQUALS	???
(2)	THEE	"	SUN	"	"
(3)	HERO	"	COT	"	"
(4)	REST	"	TAP	"	"
(5)	TIDE	"	SOP	"	"

Solution to today's ANAGRAM on Page 10.